

# Must We Kill Neutrals?

By Oswald Garrison Villard

**A**RE THERE any Americans besides myself who felt a deep shock of horror and humiliation when they read that American Flying Fortresses had bombed the Dutch city of Rotterdam, done enormous damage to it and killed hundreds of its men, women and children? It seemed to me as if my eyes must be betraying me, for it is not yet three years since the whole world was roused to its deepest depths by the abominable crime of the nazis in bombing that almost unarmed city, wiping out several square miles of it and, according to reliable reports, killing in less than an hour 30,000 men, women and children. And now I read this:

LONDON, March 31.—United States Fortresses today bombed the harbor and shipbuilding area of Rotterdam, the largest port on the Continent and chief port of call for German coastal convoys. It was the ninth American raid on Axis Europe this month. Only one bomber was lost. A joint British-American communique said that shipping and shipbuilding yards which extend some sixteen miles along Rotterdam's waterfront were the targets. Bombs were seen to burst in the target area, but, owing to heavy clouds, observation of results was difficult.

The official German communique departed from the usual practice of all the belligerents, including ourselves, of minimizing the results of an enemy raid and declared that "the residential quarters in the city were struck badly and great losses were caused among the population." A second report of our attack on Antwerp has placed the deaths of men, women and children caused by American bombs at more than 2,000, with nearly 1,000 more in hospitals and missing.

## *Innocents Sure to Suffer*

Now I am not prepared to accept such German figures as true, and no one, I am sure, has a keener sense than I of the revolting hypocrisy of the nazis in dwelling upon our attack on Rotterdam when their own crime there was beyond description. But it stands to reason that when our mighty Fortresses drop their bombs on a thickly populated city when the clouds are so heavy as to prevent accurate vision, many innocent persons are bound to lose their lives. Even under the best circumstances, despite the relative accuracy of our famed bombsight, planes flying at great speed and at great heights, and subject to dangerous anti-aircraft fire, cannot be certain of hitting only "military objectives." So in our joint attack with British fliers on Antwerp on April 5, it is not at all impossible that 180 children were killed in the collapse of one schoolhouse, and that the population suffered great losses. Nor is it unreasonable to believe that during our American raid on Paris on April 4, 252 persons were killed and 700 injured.\*

Of course I am aware of every argument advanced in defense of such bombings. Here they are: "We do not wish to kill innocent neutrals any more than we desire to destroy or maim women and children. But total war is

total war, and everybody is in it. You must fight fire with fire. It is highly regrettable, of course, but the guilt and responsibility are not ours; it was the Germans who began this horrible business. Our fliers do the best they can to restrict themselves to attacks upon Germans or legitimate military objectives. They don't like this business any more than you do, but war is war. What a supremely ridiculous position we should be in if we refused to bomb, and how quickly the nazis would seize the opportunity to increase their bombings at our expense and that of our allies! No, we must be unsentimental and thorough if we are going to win this war, as of course we will and must."

## *Destroying Our Friends*

Undoubtedly the majority of the American people would vote to continue to bomb German cities. But what I am concerned about is the horrible situation in which we find ourselves when we are destroying by these raids thousands of the friendly people whom we are trying to rescue from the brutal misgovernment and torture of the nazis. The more we speed up and increase the scope of our bombings of Europe, the more these innocent bystanders will suffer—and the more difficult will they find it to believe that we are really approaching them in the spirit of good will and Christian fellowship. They must find it very hard—those who survive—to have us tell them, as they behold the mangled bodies of their dead, that it hurts us more than them to do this, but that we must do it for their own good in order eventually to free those of them who are left from the tyranny under which they live. What a dreadful contradiction it all is!

It is to be noted, too, that Rotterdam does not rank as a fortified city. It is true of course that there are German troops there. But it has hitherto been a rule in warfare that open cities were not to be attacked. Even the Japanese did not bomb Manila after MacArthur declared that it was an open city, if press accounts are to be trusted.

## *Roosevelt's Plea Against Bombing*

That there is any military gain in killing a lot of women and children no one will contend. It only takes Europe another step toward general chaos and destruction. So obvious is this that at the outbreak of the war President Roosevelt made his moving and highly creditable appeal to all belligerent nations urging them not to bomb civilian populations. If there are those who have forgotten this, here are his words:

The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth during the past two years, which has resulted in the maiming and in the death of thousands of defenseless men, women and children, has sickened the hearts of civilized men and women, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.

If resort is had to this form of inhuman barbarism during the period of the tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings

\*Since Mr. Villard wrote, several London papers have protested against American bombing of civilians in occupied European cities. See the editorial on page 478.



who have no responsibility for and who are not even remotely participating in the hostilities which have now broken out, will lose their lives. I am therefore addressing this urgent appeal to every government which may be engaged in hostilities to affirm its determination that its armed forces shall not in any event and not under any circumstances undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities upon the understanding that this same rule of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all of their opponents. I request an immediate reply.

Is there nothing to be done about this? Must we sit by while our fliers obey orders and raid the occupied United Nations as well as German cities? Well, here is an answer from England. The Associated Press reports that a committee of seven Englishmen has petitioned the government and the R.A.F. to "stop bombing civilians in Europe." This appeal is embodied in a sixteen-page pamphlet with a preface signed by Prof. H. Stanley Jevons, the British author, and T. Corder Catchpool, a Quaker well known in this country and in England. On the front cover is a photograph of part of Genoa, with these words: "Imagine the horror of 8,000-pound or 4,000-pound bombs dropped on these densely-packed, tall houses." The preface explains that the committee, called the "Bombing Restriction Committee," was formed by a number of persons "horrified" at the "very heavy death toll of civilians in the 1,000-bomber British raid on Cologne," and is also an outgrowth of a committee formed for the abolition of night bombing. The committee declares that it is not objecting to precision bombing of military and industrial targets carried on under favorable conditions, but that it protests against the "inhuman and un-English" practice of making war on civilians.

#### *Coventry's Bishop Speaks*

Just what effect this appeal will have cannot be judged at this distance. But that it perhaps represents a stirring of the British conscience appears from another dispatch reporting that Dr. Mervyn G. Haigh, the bishop of Winchester, protested, on the same day that witnessed the release of the Jevons-Catchpool pamphlet, that "gloating over R. A. F. raids on Germany is tending toward the moral deterioration of the British people." Dr. Haigh deplored the "growing tendency to speak about our raids on Germany, and their effect, in a rather callous and brutal way." "We must remember," he added, "that what is horrible and lamentable in Coventry and Southampton also is horrible and lamentable in Wilhelmshaven and Cologne." Lest anybody think that Bishop Haigh does not know what bombing is like, and how awful was the destruction wreaked by the nazis in his own country, it is sufficient to say that he was the Bishop of Coventry when German air-raiders destroyed about 70 per cent of that city.

The bishop has put his finger upon one aspect of the whole horrible business, and that is the spiritual effect upon those who, willing or unwilling, are a part of the wrongdoing. We in America are also losing our moral perspective. We are becoming so calloused and hardened that it seems as if we were just about indifferent to the loss of life wherever it is taking place.

Can we not visualize and feel deeply enough about the victims of such bombing, whatever their nationality, to

make some kind of protest against this kind of warfare upon civilians? Can we not join those brave Englishmen who have circulated that pamphlet and voice our thanks to Bishop Haigh for his warning that we must not allow ourselves, the onlookers, to be brutalized?

#### *Boot on the Other Foot*

One difficulty with us is our inability to be sufficiently objective when we read what we ourselves are doing. Like the Germans, like the French, like the Russians, like all the rest, we are sure that when *our* soldiers and sailors and aviators resort to dreadful measures it is somehow utterly different from the use of those methods with the same results by persons on the other side. Thus we were all shocked at the outbreak of the war to read of German fliers deliberately *strafing*—odious and utterly misleading German word that that is—British railway trains carrying unarmed commuters to their work in London. Yet only the other day one of our military communiques reported with satisfaction that our air raiders had *strafed*—using the same word—some railway trains which must have been at least partially filled by civilians. The boot is on the other foot! Yet morally speaking there is no difference in the boot.

Even among pacifists I find a disinclination to protest against these raids and other inhuman forms of modern war. Their reason is that such things are inevitable when war begins, and that they must not let their protests against the whole institution be weakened by hot indignation against any one phase of it. That seems to me wrong. There is a difference when the victims are women and children. It was the loss of unarmed and unoffending American neutrals on the *Lusitania* which so profoundly stirred the American people in 1915, and in the minds of many made inevitable our entering into that war. Total as this war is in its extent and its iniquity, we certainly have the right to protest when it engulfs helpless men, women and children, just as we have the right to protest with all the power at our command against the nazi massacres, continuing every day, of innocent people like the male citizens of Lidice.

#### *An Attempt Worth Making*

But, I hear it asked, what use is it to move in this direction if the Germans will not? The answer is that only the other day intimations came from the Axis countries that there was a movement there to stop this indiscriminate bombing of open cities. It was sneeringly portrayed in the New York press as a cowardly effort on the part of the Germans to save themselves from just retribution now that American and British fliers were beginning to dump upon Berlin and Munich and Essen and Hamburg more bombs at a time than the Germans dropped upon London on the most terrible of the hundred days of their unceasing raids upon England. Why must we take a feeler of this kind from the enemy camp in such a spirit? Why should we not give thanks that the desire to spare the innocent is stirring in the breasts of some of them? Actually, I am certain, there are many German men and women who, in the words of President Roosevelt, have had their hearts sickened and their consciences



shocked by "this form of inhuman barbarism" to which their soldiers and aviators have contributed so vast a share. Ought we not to move in the spirit of Professor Jevons and Mr. Catchpool and the committees cited by them to insist that President Roosevelt now seek again to accomplish what he could not in 1939?

What if he fails again? We shall be no worse off. And if we can succeed in setting some limits to the bombing,

as these British Friends think we can, that would be all to the good. At least let us hope that it will not be necessary for other clerics to do what Archbishop Spellman did—bless the crews of American bombers who must show no mercy to the innocent because their orders forbid. If there is no way out but to continue this slaughter of all our friends and sympathizers who come within range, let us at least hang our heads in humiliation and humility.

## Preparing for the Aftermath

By Hugh Stevenson Tigner

OF COURSE nobody has any way of knowing the specific character of the situations with which we shall have to deal five years hence or one year hence. When a lot of unknown compounds are thrown into a cauldron, stirred up and brought to a boil, it is impossible to predict the result. But we do not stand entirely in the dark. There are a few things we know, and the above is one of them. That bit of knowledge tells us that we are caught in the midst of a world-wide, revolutionary process; that swift, drastic and profound change is the order of our day. Just knowing this is important. It at least warns us that we shall be called upon to face and do some very new things, and that tomorrow we cannot expect simply to take up again where we left off yesterday.

### *False Hope and Groundless Faith*

It is a handicap that we went into this period of history calling it an "emergency." For while the word emergency refers to a sudden and serious circumstance calling for immediate and forthright action, it also implies a temporary interruption, something that comes and goes, allowing us to proceed, when it is past, as if nothing critical had ever happened. But this is a *total* emergency; everything is involved in it. Those who think tomorrow will be a resumption of yesterday are preparing themselves for nothing but frustration and bewilderment, fright and anger. They will prove easy victims of panic, and will be unable to take any responsible, purposeful or creative part in the future.

One can see a tendency upon the part of some to dispense cheap cheer to the American people by encouraging them to hold illusory hopes. The line of talk is much like that handed out by a dentist to a child whose tooth is about to be extracted: "Just one short hurt and your troubles will be over." The dentist's words are true, within the situation to which they apply; the words of the national comforters are not, and they are a menace to us.

It is emphatically true that we need to have hope and confidence for the future. Without hope and faith men fail and perish. But false hope and groundless faith turn out to be terrible liabilities. They stimulate today and poison tomorrow. We must see the hopes, the promises, the high possibilities in our occasion; but we must not think they can be reached without a long journey through

the wilderness. The only gain this war will have brought us is a moral opportunity to build a new kind of world order, and such structures are not built without hard work, without perplexity, pain, sacrifices. Our true hopes lie on the other side of hardships, and we cannot move toward them without accepting the hardships.

### *Disappointments Ahead*

Those who think we can lay down our heavy burdens at the end of this war and say, "There! That unpleasant job is done; we can now return to 'normalcy' and forget about it," are not facing the facts. Those who expect the next armistice to bring a decrease in our responsibilities or a diminution of our problems are cherishing a vain hope. Those who think that as soon as Hitler and the Japanese warlords are told where to go and are prodded there at the point of a bayonet, our biggest problem will have been solved; that automobiles will begin rolling off the assembly lines; that the system of rationing and priorities will be scrapped; that a new wave of material abundance will roll over our land—those who have expectations of this order are going to be disappointed, and the sooner we get such false notions out of our heads the better will our minds be prepared to entertain the truth and do something fruitful with it.

The truth is that we have been thrust into a new situation. For one thing, this crisis marks the passing forever of the old distinction between foreign and domestic affairs, between national and international problems. To a very considerable degree our domestic problems will be mixed with the problems of the world. We shall find ourselves beset with what used to be called "foreign entanglements"—not simply for the duration of the war but for the duration of mankind.

### *A Withdrawal That Failed*

At the end of the last war we had a notion that we could pull away from the scene of disaster, leave Europe to stew in its own corrupt juices and overlook Asia as too backward to deal with seriously, avoid the vexing problem of how man shall get along with his fellow man and nation with nation, come home, enjoy our own prosperity, remain comfortable within the "American system" and collect our war loans. For a short season it looked as if we might succeed in that effort. Within less than twenty-five